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COMMERCE FOR 4520/ITA/ANESA/MTALAAT  
USTR FOR SAUMS

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SUBJECT: Egypt: Minister of Agriculture Discusses  
Poultry - Ban and Efforts to Combat Avian Influenza

1. Summary: Ambassador Ricciardone met with Egyptian Minister of Agriculture, Ahmed El Leithy, to discuss the Egyptian ban on imports of poultry products from all sources, and to discuss the upcoming USDA mission to assess status of implementation of the Bio-safety Protocol. The Ambassador also stressed the need to find ways to resolve the issue of halal slaughter procedures that have effectively kept U.S. poultry meat out of the Egyptian market for many years. The Ambassador used the opportunity to thank the Minister for allowing exports of palm fronds from Egypt to the United States to be used in the celebrations for the Jewish holiday of Succot. End Summary

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Avian Influenza Related Ban on Imports of Poultry Products  
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2. On November 14, 2005, Ambassador Ricciardone, accompanied by the Agricultural Counselor and Econ Officer, met with the Egyptian Minister of Agriculture, Ahmed El Leithy, to discuss a range of bilateral issues. The most pressing issue discussed during the meeting was the recent decree issued by the Minister to ban imports of all poultry products from all sources to protect against the possibility of transmitting avian influenza (AI) to the Egyptian domestic flock.

3. The Ambassador pointed out that a blanket ban of this nature without regard to the exporting country's AI status was excessive and not consistent with guidelines issued by international organizations such as the OIE and the FAO. He raised the specific issue of shipments of feather meal coming from the U.S. to Egypt and stressed that the United States was AI free at this time, and that the process to produce feather meal involved extremely high temperatures, which should eliminate any threat posed by the potential presence of AI in products of this type.

4. The Ambassador informed the Minister that three shipments of feather meal, valued at almost \$400,000 had arrived at the Egyptian ports and are not being allowed entry in spite of the fact that they either arrived in Egypt prior to the GOE ban being announced or were already on the water when the ban was imposed. The Ambassador requested the Minister to help with obtaining clearances through the port procedures for all these shipments to avoid any additional demurrage costs to the Egyptian importers.

5. Minister El Leithy responded that although he issued the decree to impose this AI-related ban, the decision was actually made by a committee that consisted of Ministers of Agriculture, Health, Environment, and Aviation. While the Minister was sympathetic to the Embassy concerns, any decision to remove the ban or make exceptions for individual shipments would have to be made by the Ministerial Committee. The Minister asked the Embassy to make a written request and promised to present it to the Committee with a positive recommendation from the Ministry of Agriculture to make an exception for the shipments that had departed from the United States before the ban was announced.

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Ban on U.S. Poultry Meat Imports Due to Halal Slaughter Procedures  
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6. The Ambassador stressed the need to resolve the longstanding issue of halal slaughter procedures in the U.S. to remove this non-tariff trade barrier. The Ambassador recognized that this restriction was used primarily to protect the domestic poultry industry, but argued that many U.S. poultry products, especially turkey meat, could be a great source of low priced protein for the Egyptian consumers, and would not have any impact on the domestic poultry industry.

7. The Minister responded that he was intrigued with the possibility of importing turkey meat from the U.S., and would like to look for ways to allow such imports once the whole issue of the AI-related ban on all poultry products

was resolved. He indicated that the AI-related ban on all poultry products was expected to remain in effect for three months and hoped that the worldwide concerns about the AI transmission would subside during this time. (Comment: This is the first time that any senior GOE official has expressed flexibility on the halal slaughter issue to allow imports of any poultry products. Post will continue to pursue this angle in the hope of eventually eliminating the halal slaughter procedures concerns for good. End Comment)

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GOE Request to Help Establish a Biotechnology National Authority  
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18. The Ambassador informed the Minister that the Egyptian Agricultural Counselor in Washington had asked for USG assistance in establishing a Biotechnology National Authority in the Ministry of Agriculture. He added that we are ready to provide this assistance and a team of USDA experts is coming to Egypt during the first week of December. The Ambassador asked the Minister if this GOE request had been made with his blessing and had a broader approval of other GOE Agencies.

19. The Minister indicated that he wanted to pursue the idea of establishing a National Authority in the Foreign Relations section of the Ministry of Agriculture, and that he had discussed this with the Minister of Environment. He added that the Minister of Environment agreed with the MinAg proposal to set up this Authority that would be a focal point for legislation and establishing regulations for food and agricultural products. The Minister welcomed the idea of the USDA team coming to Egypt and asked that we coordinate this team's visit with the Under Secretary of Foreign Relations at MinAg, and the Director of the Agricultural Genetic Engineering Institute.

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USG-GOE Cooperation on Surveillance for AI in Egypt  
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10. The Ambassador told the Minister that the USG considers AI a serious threat facing the international community and offered assistance to the GOE in their efforts to expand surveillance of the domestic poultry industry. The Egyptian Under Secretary for Livestock production, who was present in the meeting, responded that AgCounselor Chaudhry had facilitated contacts between MinAg researchers and the U.S. Naval Medical Research Unit (NAMRU). In addition, the Ministry has drafted a detailed proposal to develop a joint project with the USG to improve the Ministry's capacity to conduct testing and surveillance of the domestic poultry flock. The proposal will be forwarded to the AgCounselor to coordinate a USG response.

RICCIARDONE